

**Communication in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang**  
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**HG2052 Assignment 1**

**1. Introduction**

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) is a mobile multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) developed and published by Moonton where two opposing teams fight with characters known as “heroes” to defeat the enemy’s base while defending their own. MLBB was released in 2016 and has risen in popularity in South East Asia, such that it was selected as the first medal event esports competition at the 2019 Southeast Asian Games in the Philippines. The average monthly MLBB player rose from 50,325,452 in July 2019 to 75,645,550 in January 2021 (Figure 1). This goes to show that the game is widely played worldwide, given the fact that it is on mobile phones, which gives players the ease of accessibility to play it wherever they desire.

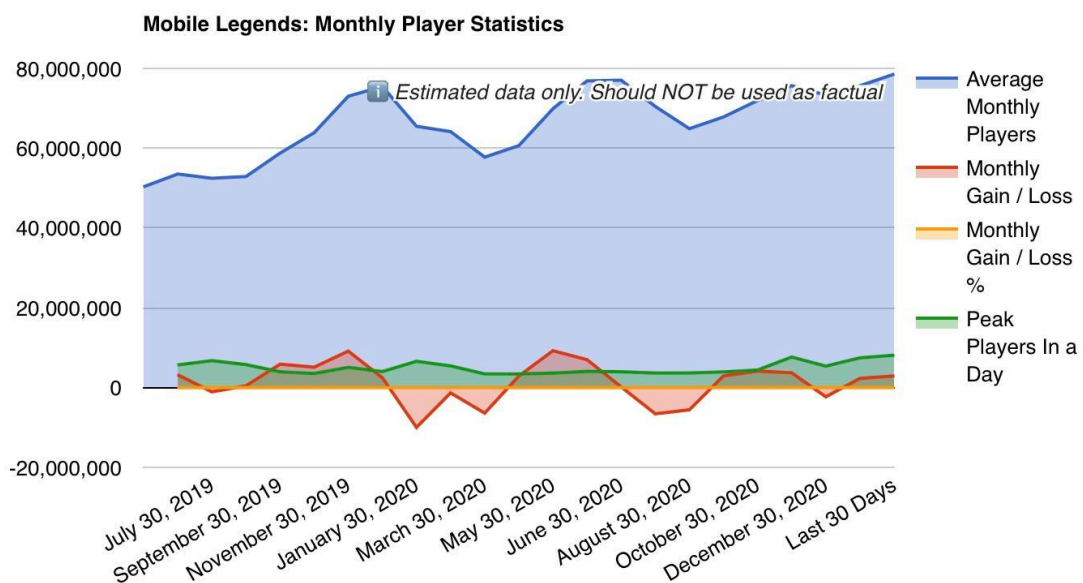


Figure 1: MLBB Monthly Player Statistics (*Mobile Legends Live Player Count and Statistics*, n.d.)

## **2. Relevant Literature**

A research conducted using the literature on gestures and non-verbal communication illustrates “ping” use in multiplayer games and investigated the impact of the actions on performance in teams (Leavitt et al., 2016). The study concluded that players have to continuously communicate through different communication systems to improve their gaming strategies, and that communication between team players are crucial to win the game. This is especially relevant to MLBB, where the game is designed for faster gameplay on the mobile phone.

Every action the players take is crucial to the game, and that reinforces the fact that players do communicate with one another during gameplay through the different non-verbal communication systems. The different communication systems identified above are efficient and clear, for players to directly relay their messages almost instantaneously, without having to type or physically voice out their intention.

However, the problem with that is that the instantaneous nature of the game cultivates impatience and lack of consideration for other players, bringing about discrimination and toxicity during gameplay (Nuyen et al., 2016). This mode of gaming (MOBA) is bound to cultivate a toxic and discriminatory culture among the players (Märtens et al., 2015), where negative and sarcastic messages are often exchanged during gameplay. Thus, communication in MLBB is mainly to improve the strategy of the team and enhance gameplay, also to spite others when feelings such as frustration emerges.

## **3. Communication systems in MLBB and its effect on communication**

There are four main in-game communication systems that can be used by all players simultaneously or by itself. The first communication system is the game’s three main signals indicating “Launch Attack”, “Initiate Retreat” and “Request Backup” respectively. With the tap of the signals, the team would be immediately notified (Figure 2), and act accordingly.

The second communication system is the live text-based communication messaging platform (Figure 3), similar to social networking systems (SNS). Players can choose their desired target audience, namely, addressing their team, or to all players in the game including the enemy. If the game’s system identified that a player had been abusing the chat system, the player would automatically be muted for a while to promote a friendlier environment during the gameplay. This is the case when players get frustrated and there are also quick responses that players can choose, that are set by default by the game, for

quicker interaction. (Figure 4). The third communication system is the built-in voice system that players can choose to enable or not (Figure 5). The built-in voice system is much like regular telephone conversations, where players across different countries can speak to each other, without being face-to-face, not seeing each other. Lastly, the fourth communication system is the use of battle emotes. Much like Whatsapp's stickers, they are displayed on top of heroes for a few seconds, some having small animation and voice effects (Figure 5). The emotes can be seen by all players for a few seconds before disappearing.



Figure 2: Signals Notification

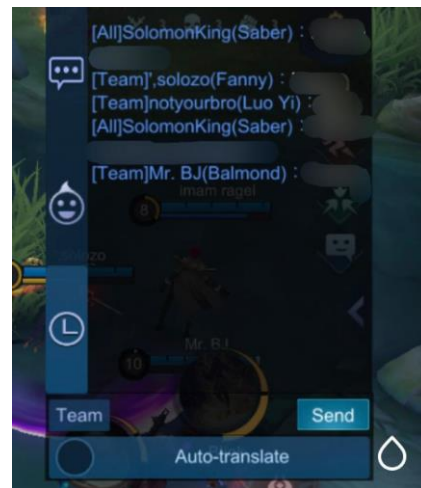


Figure 3: Live text communication

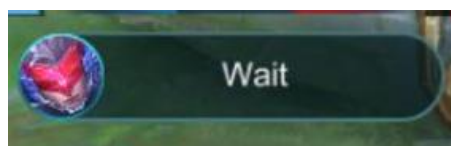


Figure 4: Example of quick response



Figure 5: Voice system



Figure 6: Battle emote example

#### **4. Modes of communication MLBB has enabled**

Generally, MLBB has enabled players to watch live streams of other players, enabling them to comment and give virtual gifts to the streamers in-game, similar to Twitch. While may not be particularly “new”, communities of supporters are formed from such live-streams, where players support individual pro-players, or even renowned teams especially worldwide during Esports competitions.

MLBB has enabled players spanning regions to communicate through the quick response communication system. Simple terms such as “Wait”, “Okay” or “Gather and Ambush” are simple military terminology that is commonly used in other video games that is understandable by most players regardless of language differences (Horowitz, 2019).

MLBB has also reinforced the use of military lingo. There are many similarities in the language used in the game as well as military terminologies used. There are many terminologies created and used by players on the platform, that is very recognisable and understandable by players and soldiers (Friedman, 2016). It is known that teamwork is crucial in securing victory, both in the military and in-game. Thus, usage of such terminologies can contribute to more efficient communication between players (Achille, Schulze & Schimdt-Nielsen, 2009).

#### **5. General effects of MLBB on society**

There is a rise in streamers pursuing gaming as careers due to the potential of earning high income from playing the game. MLBB has become a source of income for some (Loganathan, 2018). The game has also contributed to COVID-19 relief measures by creating a charity showmatch online (Terng, 2020).

Research also suggested that there is no evidence that impacts the quality of family communication, in regards to the duration of gameplay or how long the player has played MLBB (Lande et al., 2019).

#### **6. General effects of MLBB on language**

MLBB has many different properties that impact the communication between players, which also affects the language used for communication.

One property of MLBB’s gameplay is that it is designed to be fast-paced. This prompts the communication systems to keep up with the speed of the game. For example, players need

not type out their messages, and instead could use the quick response feature to instantaneously relay their message to the team or also to the enemy. This improves the collaboration between players as they need not spend time to type out long sentences, getting an almost immediate response from their teammate (Spyridonis et al., 2018).

Since players in the same server may span across different regions with different languages, players are more likely to use the quick responses function, where the game would automatically translate some default phrases from one language to another (e.g., English to Indonesia).

### 7. Seven Features of Spoken and Written Communication with MLBB

To compare whether MLBB is more speech-like or text-like in terms of its characteristics, the seven features as introduced by Crystal (2006) will be used.

<b>SPEECH-LIKE</b>	<b>TEXT-LIKE</b>
Time-bound*	Space-bound
Spontaneous*	Contrived
Face-to-face*	Visually deconstructed
Loosely structured*	Elaborately structured
Socially interactive*	Factually communicative
Immediately revisable*	Repeatedly revisable*
Prosodically rich*	Graphically rich*

Table 1: David Crystal's Seven Features table. Marked \* denotes the features of MLBB communication

Firstly, comparing features of MLBB to be time-bound or space-bound, communication in MLBB can be said to be time bound (Crystal, 2006). Players can privately message each other in the game, or in the public chat, out of match. However, the messages previously would disappear after the player logs off or when the public chat is refreshed respectively. This is to accommodate newer and more relevant chats, instead of cluttering the chat, for more efficient communication between players. In in-game chatting, texts that other players send are shown for thirty-seconds, or until the multiple messages pop up for the text to vanish, deeming it less relevant. This makes the chat temporary and more effective. Players would be able to read it while it is still there, or they can choose to view it in the chat history after a while in-game. Also, the voice system does not record and replay for players due to

the live nature of the conversation. The conversations between a player and its intended audience are direct as players have the freedom to choose their target audience via the live text communication or the voice system.

Secondly, MLBB has more speech-like characteristics (Crystal, 2006). In-game, lags are not encouraged as it disrupts the flow of the game and hence, communication in text and speech are spontaneous and quick, thus having almost immediate acknowledgements in-game. The players also are unable to plan in advance for their game as different situations may arise, thus not being able to form complex sentences during in-game. The quick replies function is often used for effective communication. Since players need not respond systematically, sentence boundaries are blurred and not clear. Players may oftentimes talk over one another during the match in the voice chatting system and messages may be sent at the same time by all players in the game, hence there is a lack of control over the exact time that the speaker's intended audience would respond.

Thirdly, MLBB has more face-to-face characteristics (Crystal, 2006) and inclining towards speech-like features. Emotes and external commands replace extralinguistic cues such as gestures, body language and facial expressions in-game. Players are not able to view other player's facial expressions when they are playing the game, the heroes selected and specific emotes with different emotions acting like emojis would replace such features.

Also, on the matter of structure (Crystal, 2006), MLBB is loosely structured and hence more speech-like. Due to the fast-paced nature of the game, sentences are significantly shortened in length for efficient communication. Informal vocabulary such as "Good Game", abbreviated to "GG", is very common in such MOBA games. When players in MLBB get frustrated by another, they would sometimes spurt obscene language, which is represented by asterisk in the game chat, even if the vulgarity is of another language.

Next, MLBB is socially interactive among its players, embodying more speech-like features. Prosody of players can be seen when they capitalise their text or repeatedly spam the signals to convey emotions over the chat. Emotes and signals also convey specific messages across to another player. An example would be when the players address "Good Game" to all players including the enemy, indicating sarcastic tones in its message. Players are free to make any kind of conversation they want in game as long as the system does not detect them to be spamming the chat or uttering vulgarities to be muted. This feature enables players to socially interact with one another in the game.

In terms of revisability (Crystal, 2006), communication in MLBB tends towards speech-like characteristics, however, it also incorporates text-like features as well. Once a message, signal, or quick response gets sent out, it cannot be retrieved back. Players are unable to edit or delete a sentence of text after it is sent to other players in the game. In the voice system, players are unable to withdraw whatever they uttered beforehand. Players also often disrupt each other during communication in game, in the text and voice systems without any restrictions or systematic structure. However, errors can be both immediately and repeatedly revisable after it is sent out during the game after the player has sent out the intended message by uttering or typing the correct intended message to get their point across.

Finally, MLBB is both prosodically rich and graphically rich in terms of communication (Crystal, 2006). The voice chat conversations are rich in prosody, where players oftentimes emphasize words to indicate a sense of importance and urgency. In the live text-based communication, players can capitalize words or alphabets to their liking, and include punctuations where they deem fit. These features in messages help to replace speech-like characteristics in the game when players choose not to use the voice system.

## **8. Conclusion**

In summary, MLBB's communication system enables players to communicate with other individuals. Text-like and speech-like characteristics of MLBB were compared on the basis of seven features by David Crystal. It is a platform that dominates in mostly speech-like communication despite the array of communication systems enabling 'text-to-face' communication with the broadcasters.

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